

Message Text

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ACTION HA-05

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EA-10 SS-15 NSC-05 SP-02 CIAE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9393
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 0227

BANGKOK FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF, SN
SUBJECT: PROPOSED SINGAPORE TRANSIT CAMP FOR VIETNAMESE "BOAT
CASE" REFUGEES

REF: (A) SINGAPORE 0224, (B) SINGAPORE 0226

1. IN THE WAKE OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN'S AND CHAIRMAN
WOLFF'S CONVERSATIONS WITH PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW ON THE
REFUGEE TRANSIT CAMP ISSUE, I FELT IT WOULD BE WORTH ONE MORE
TRY. ACCORDINGLY, ON THE AFTERNOON OF JANUARY 14 I TOOK THE
OPPORTUNITY PRESENTED BY A CALL ON PM LEE BY DR. GEORGE TANHAM
OF RAND TO ADDRESS THE MATTER. THIS CAME AFTER A HALF HOUR
EXCHANGE OF VIEWS BETWEEN PM LEE AND DR. TANHAM ON THE SITUATION
IN THAILAND, WHICH WILL BE REPORTED SEPARATELY.

2. I TOLD PM LEE THAT THE DEPTH OF FEELING IN WASHINGTON ON
THE MATTER OF VIETNAMESE "BOAT CASE" REFUGEES WAS VERY INTENSE,
ESPECIALLY SINCE WHILE WE WERE TALKING REFUGEES FROM VIETNAM
WERE CONTINUING TO DIE. I CALLED TO HIS ATTENTION AN ITEM IN
THAT MORNING'S STRAITS TIMES REPORTING THE DEATH BY
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DROWNING OF SIX VIETNAMESE WASHED OVERBOARD FROM A FISHING BOAT.
I SAID THAT I DID NOT KNOW WHAT IF ANYTHING MIGHT BE
DONE ON THE U.S. SIDE IN RESPONSE TO THE POSITION HE HAD
TAKEN REQUIRING US TO ESTABLISH QUOTAS OR IF FOR THAT
MATTER WE WOULD WANT TO PURSUE THE QUESTION ANY FURTHER
WITH HIM AT ALL; HOWEVER, I THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE
WORTHWHILE IF I COULD GET TOGETHER WITH SOMEONE ON HIS

SIDE TO SEE IF A FORMULA MIGHT BE FOUND WHICH WOULD BE RESPONSIVE BOTH TO HIS CRITERIA AND THE REALITIES OF THE PROBLEM AS WE PERCEIVED THEM. I SAID I WOULD ALSO COMMUNICATE WITH WASHINGTON IN THIS REGARD.

3. PM LEE DID NOT DEVIATE FROM THE LINE HE HAD TAKEN BOTH WITH ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN AND CHAIRMAN WOLFF; NAMELY, THAT HE WANTED ASSURANCES IN ADVANCE FROM RECIPIENT COUNTRIES CONCERNED AS TO THE NUMBERS THEY WOULD TAKE. THESE ASSURANCES WOULD BE PRIVATE, AND MIGHT BE IN THE FORM OF A LETTER, E.G. ONE SIGNED BY ME TO HIM. HE WENT OVER ONCE AGAIN THE SITUATION AS IT EXISTED FOR HIM IN THE LATTER PART OF 1975, AND HIS SENTIMENTS CONCERNING THE UNHCR'S INABILITY TO DO ANYTHING MORE THAN "HAWK" VIETNAMESE REFUGEES AROUND. HE WANTED ASSURANCES IN WRITING, HE SAID, ONLY BECAUSE THE SITUATION AFFECTING A GIVEN COUNTRY MIGHT CHANGE. IN THIS REGARD, HE RECALLED THAT MY PREDECESSOR HAD ASKED HIM IN THE SPRING OF 1975 TO PROVIDE SPACE FOR 30-40,000 VIETNAMESE REFUGEES, IN RESPONSE TO WHICH HE HAD BEEN PREPARED TO SET ASIDE AN UNCOMPLETED SINGAPORE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT. IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, THE REFUGEES HAD NEVER APPEARED DUE TO THE RAPID DETERIORATION OF THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM. THUS, I, MYSELF, MIGHT NOT BE IN SINGAPORE TOO MUCH LONGER AND HE WOULD WANT TO HAVE A WRITTEN RECORD OF WHAT HAD TRANSPIRED.

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4. PM LEE THEN INDICATED, HOWEVER, THAT HE WOULD HAVE NO OBJECTION IF I WANTED TO GET TOGETHER WITH CHIA CHEONG FOOK (NOTE: CHIA CHEONG FOOK, WHO IS PERMANENT SECRETARY OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, WAS THE INDIVIDUAL WHO FOLLOWED ME INTO THE HALL SUBSEQUENT TO ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN'S CONVERSATION WITH FOREIGN MINISTER RAJARATNAM ON JANUARY 12 TO SPEAK OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SINGAPORE'S ACCOMMODATING SEVERAL HUNDRED REFUGEES. OBVIOUSLY PM LEE HAD BEEN IN CONTACT WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, BECAUSE ON THIS OCCASION I MERELY SUGGESTED TO HIM THE POSSIBILITY OF MEETING WITH SOMEONE -- UNSTATED -- ON HIS SIDE AND NAMED NO NAMES.)

5. I LEAVE IT TO THE DEPARTMENT TO JUDGE WHETHER IT WILL SERVE ANY USEFUL PURPOSE TO DISCUSS THE REFUGEE TRANSIT CAMP QUESTION ANY FURTHER WITH PM LEE OR WITH OTHER SINGAPORE OFFICIALS. THERE MAY BE SOME SLIGHT DENT IN PM LEE'S ARMOR, AS INDICATED BY HIS WILLINGNESS TO PERMIT DISCUSSIONS WITH CHIA CHEONG FOOK. HOWEVER, AS MATTERS NOW STAND I WOULD REQUIRE GUIDANCE FROM THE DEPARTMENT ON WHAT I MIGHT SAY WITH RESPECT TO NUMBERS OF REFUGEES THE U.S. COULD TAKE, THE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH THEY MIGHT BE ADMITTED, AND WHAT AID MIGHT BE EXPECTED FROM OTHER COUNTRIES.

6. IN ANY EVENT, PM LEE'S INSISTENCE ON A QUOTA
(OR A "BANKABLE GUARANTEE") WITH RESPECT TO ONWARD
MOVEMENT ILLUSTRATES ONE POINT WHICH OCCUPIES THE
ATTENTION OF ALL COUNTRIES IN THIS REGION: UNLESS FIRM
PROVISIONS MADE BY US AND OTHERS FOR ONWARD MOVEMENT
OF REFUGEES WITHIN A REASONABLE AMOUNT OF TIME, OFFICIAL
ATTITUDES WILL HARDEN -- SINGAPORE'S ATTITUDE IS ALREADY
ADAMANTINE -- AND AVENUES OF HAVEN WHICH ARE NOW OPEN MAY
CLOSE. UNHCR ASSURANCES ARE UNLIKELY TO SUFFICE.

7. AS A FINAL THOUGHT, WOULD IT BE POSSIBLE WITHIN THE
PROVISIONS OF OUR OWN REGULATIONS TO RESERVE TO SINGAPORE
(OR TO ANY OTHER AREA SELECTED FOR TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION
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OF REFUGEES) SOME SPACES WITHIN THE TOTAL OF 7,000? THIS MIGHT
BE DONE WITHOUT STATING SPECIFICALLY THAT ANY GIVEN INDIVIDUAL
OR INDIVIDUALS WOULD BE TAKEN.
WHOLDRIDGE

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